

SAVE DALE FARM

Groups opposed to forced eviction walk through Wickford

MORE than 150 people, from far and wide, marched in support of Dale Farm travellers and brought Wickford to a standstill.

Travellers, and their supporters, peacefully trekked from the town's train station to Dale Farm, at Crays Hill, near Billericay, to protest against the £18million eviction, which could start next Monday.

Although the march showed the travellers have support, it was not backed by the anticipated 700 people, and it had more of a carnival atmosphere than a protest.

The travelling community was largely represented by women and children who held banners aloft, which read: "I was born in Basildon - don't cut me out" and "Shame on you" above a picture of Basildon Council leader Tony Ball.

Children also emotively chanted "save our home".

The protest, overlooked by police on horseback, left the train station at about 1.30pm on Saturday and soon stopped outside the Willows Centre in the High Street where one of the Dale Farm travellers was filmed by camera crews saying a prayer.

The procession turned into

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Market Road and then onto Irton Hill Road before making its way along London Road.

The soundtrack to the march was provided by London-based demonstration band Rhythms of Resistance.

One of its drummers seemed reluctant to talk about Dale Farm, but said the eviction was discrimination.

Supporters of Dale Farm had come from London, Oxford, Brighton, all over Essex, and even Belgium and Sweden.

Most of the protestors were part of campaign groups who had travelled to show support, with groups represented including the Socialist Workers Party, No Sweat, Amnesty International, Unite Against Racism, No-one is Illegal, Public and Commercial Services Union and South Essex Region of the Trade Union Congress.

Richard Sheridan, chairman of the Gypsy Council, dismissed the notion that groups were jumping on the bandwagon.

He said: "I'm glad to see people here from all over the country and all over the world."



■ Leave us alone - travellers and supporters march in Wickford Pictures: MAXINE CLARKE BA49085_05

Gratton Puxon, secretary of the Dale Farm Housing Association, said: "The broad support is good and this is not just about travellers, it is about people in general being made homeless, it's a wider issue."

Mr Puxon said there was a wave of support for the travellers' plight and he claimed Basildon Council had received 14,000 emails in August in support of Dale Farm.



■ Let us stay - Kathleen Gore and Shannon Egan BA49085_05

A resident in Gardiners Lane North, a man, 60, said: "There's no going back now and it's just a matter of time which, on the whole, I think most people are thankful for."

A couple who lived in

Gardiners Lane North had a little bit more sympathy for the travellers.

The woman, 30, said: "I think if they paid council tax, there would be a much better feeling towards them."

Residents support the eviction

RESIDENTS all along the march route came out of their homes - and the vast majority said it was time to say goodbye to Dale Farm.

A lady in her 60s, who lives in London Road, said: "I think they should go."

"They have not got planning permission and have broken the rules."

"If they stayed, it would be one rule for them and one rule for everyone else. If I wanted a simple extension, I'd need permission"

Another London Road resident, a 43-year-old man, said: "The quicker they are moved on, the better. It shouldn't have been allowed to go on this long, but it's good that the council is standing firm."

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